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# Yo Soy El Army

Story and Photos by SSG Alberto Betancourt

THE aroma of freshly brewed espresso wafts through the air to the rhythm of congas and saxophones blaring from giant loudspeakers at the entrances to several street cafes.

Welcome to Little Havana, USA, one of the many Latin American melting-pot neighborhoods where recruiters of the Miami Recruiting Battalion spread the “Yo Soy El Army” message.

Every morning, Monday through Friday, SSG Jose Diaz from the Miami East Recruiting Station conducts a “milk run,” during which he visits at least two new businesses and leaves Army promotional material and his business cards.

“We call it the ‘milk run’ because in the ‘old days’ milk was delivered first thing in the morning to people’s doorsteps, and we conduct this part of our business first thing in the morning,” he said. “I like to give an ‘Army of One’ T-shirt to the owners or managers who allow me to showcase my promotional material. They really like our T-shirts.”

Diaz is one of more than 250 recruiters assigned to the Miami Recruiting Battalion. The battalion is responsible for recruiting in both South Florida and Puerto Rico.

“The Miami Recruiting Battalion claims the longest history of focusing on Hispanics in recruiting efforts,” said MAJ Kate Johnson, chief of Accessions Command’s Outreach and Events Division.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are more than 34 million Latinos in the United States, or about one in

◀ SSG Gustavo Soto (*far left*) of the Hialeah Recruiting Station talks to people visiting the flight simulator display, one of three “Army of One” stations recruiters set up for the Calle Ocho festival.





SFC Juan Perez of the South Dade Recruiting Station helps Maritza Lozano with her harness before she attempts the rock-climbing wall at the Calle Ocho festival.

eight people. And 33 percent of that Latino population lives in the South, giving the Miami recruiters a large audience among which to spread the word about Army benefits.

“We use all the traditional recruiting efforts — phone calls, referrals, meetings and the Internet — to reach potential candidates. But, most of the time, we do it in Spanish,” Diaz said.

Recruiting someone from the Hispanic community into the Army becomes a major family event, he said.

“Most of the time, I not only have to sit down with the potential candidate, but also his parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings,” Diaz said. “Having all the promotional material in Spanish makes it easier for us to explain. It also shows respect for

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the elders in the family, and creates a better relationship between us and them.”

Besides using traditional recruiting tools, the recruiters also participate in major community events.

“‘Calle Ocho’ is the largest Hispanic festival in the United States and one of the largest recruiting events of the year for our recruiters,” said Harvey N. Spigler, chief of public affairs for the Miami Recruiting Battalion. “The annual March event attracts more than five million people and transforms Little Havana into a 20-block-long party.”

During Calle Ocho, more than 40 recruiters manned three stations that highlighted a flight simulator, a basketball free-throw competition, a rock-wall climb competition — where anyone who made it to the top got an “Army of One” T-shirt — and, finally, the push-up platform. The efforts brought the recruiters more than 5,000 new leads, Spigler said.

“It’s very important for us to come out to these large community events so the local people can see that we’re also a part of the community,” said SSG Danny Rodriguez, a recruiter from Florida’s Palm Springs Station. “It also offers us a great opportunity to showcase Army benefits.”

SSG Gustavo Soto, from the Hialeah Station, said the festival provided great opportunities for recruiters to help members of the Hispanic community better understand





SSG Jose Diaz of the Miami East Recruiting Station chats with Ricardo Perez (left) and Martin Rodriguez as they play dominoes in Maximo Gomez Park.

everything the Army offers.

"I really push education benefits such as the Montgomery GI Bill and the College fund," Soto said. "I try very hard to show the Latin community the many positive career opportu-

nities available in the Army."

But Miami recruiters still face some challenges, including the candidate's immigration status and possible lack of English fluency.

During a recent five-hour

recruiting mission Diaz — who understands the challenges — visited two schools, several businesses and passed by several potential candidates' home.

"The secret is that you just have to keep working harder," he said.

Diaz walked into the heart of Miami's Little Havana to get something to eat. Welcomed by Salsa music and old men playing dominoes, he ordered lunch. Suddenly, he turned and spotted a young man sitting close by. Without hesitation he approached the man and gave him his card.

"What can I say," he said. "I have more than 200 jobs I can offer him. And it's not just about the job — it's also about the pride that comes from being part of the Army. That's what 'Yo Soy El Army' is all about." 🇺🇸



SSG Carlos Nevarez of the Kendall Recruiting Station chats with prospective recruits during the Calle Ocho Festival. Such community events allow recruiters to interact with young people who may be interested in an Army career.